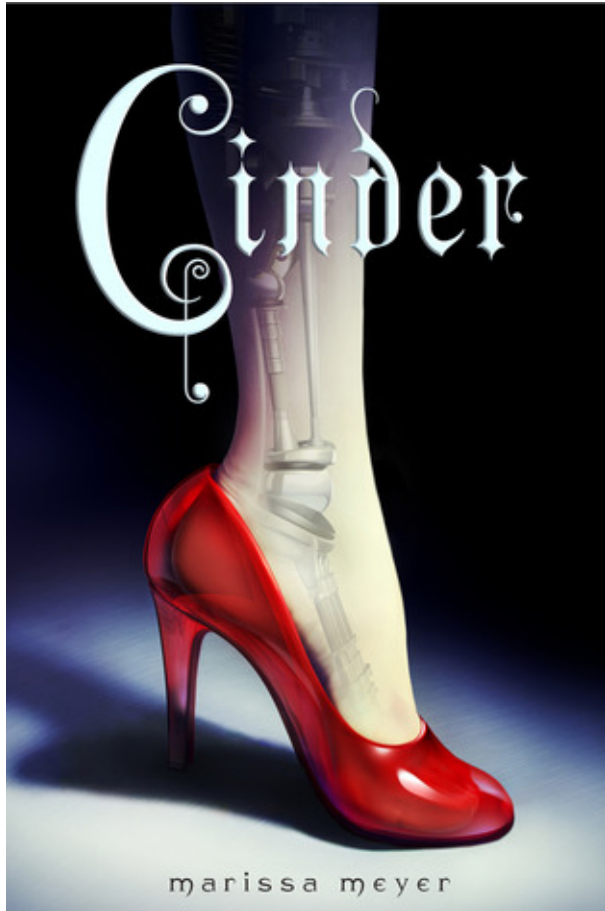


The Eternal Story—Classic Stories with Modern Twists

Out with the old and in with the new? Well not quite. Our lives are stories. Stories help teach us about our societies, our roles in said societies, and also about who we are as people. As such many stories can become dated—they can seem to fit into a different way of thinking or are less relevant to society today. Yet, there are elements of these stories that are so human they seem to transcend time. With this in mind, this text set explores classical stories that have been told in modern ways. Some of these stories focus on current setting, some are in “old” setting but have a twist to them, and some of these stories are now set in the future. In all cases, these stories use the backbones or skeleton of a well-known or “classical” story in order to create a new story. These stories are not only entertaining because they mix the old or familiar with a new perspective, but they also reveal how our understanding of our society has changed. Societal values are changed, gender roles shifted, and we see traces of what is considered acceptable behaviors transform overtime. Comparisons of traditional verses modern interpretations reveal the direct ways in which a culture, society, and time period is often reflected and reinforced in the stories we tell ourselves. In this light, these text found in this set are meant to be explored in conjunction with the original or classic story. Through the exploration of both texts students can begin to see how “cultural norms” are created and reflected in our stories. There are many more texts than the ten mentioned below—this is only meant to be the starting point.



Cinder

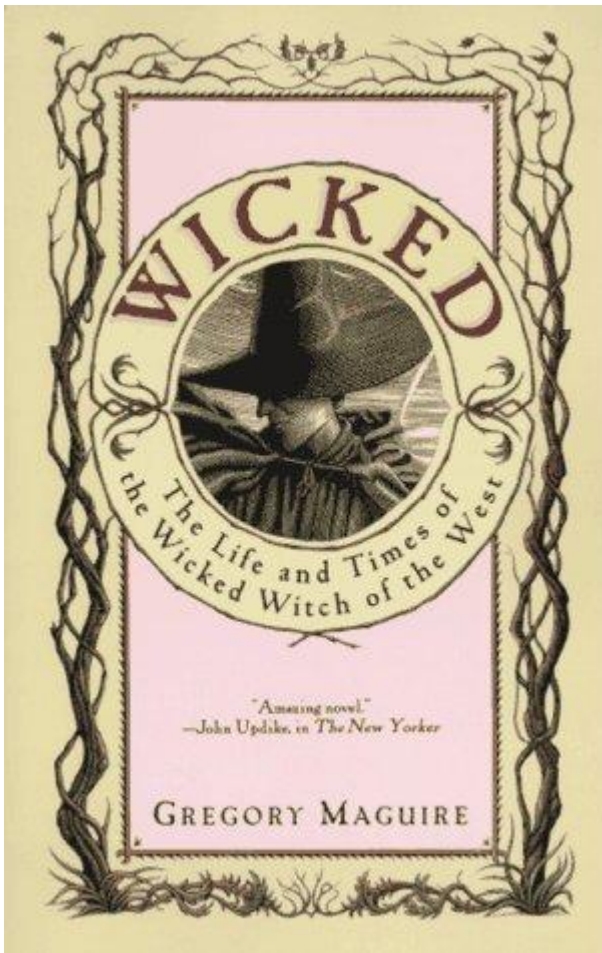
by Marissa Meyer

Summary:

Cinder is a lower class citizen of New Beijing. The human population has been depleted by a worldwide plague. The earth is under threat from an outside lunar people and the fate of the world may rest on Cinder's shoulders. However, she also has problems of her own. She's a cyborg in a world that privileges people. She also currently lives with her Stepmother who blames her for her daughter's illness. And now that Cinder has bumped into the local Prince it looks like her life will never be the same..."Caught between duty and freedom, loyalty and betrayal, she must uncover secrets about her past in order to protect her world's future."

Rationale:

I have not read this book yet, but it's on my must read list. This book is a modern re-telling of the story of Cinderella. The backbone of the original fairytale is there; however, there is a new modern futuristic twist. Not only is the book a different look (I mean who doesn't get excited about space invasions and robots!), but the message of the book has changed. This isn't just about the Prince saving Cinder from a hard life, but it is about Cinder saving herself and the world. This means there are many elements this book explores: gender roles, population health, and race roles (robots vs. humans). Themes on how one treats the "Other" can easily be explored in this text. In addition, the change from the classical happy ending (getting married) to the new happy ending (saving the world) has strong societal implications. Themes of transitioning gender roles can be explored, as well as questions on the shift from individual happiness to communal or world-focused happiness. Have our stories shifted away from the internal to the external? *Cinder* is not only an exciting futuristic re-telling of a classic fairytale, but it also offers rich commentary on our shifting views on gender roles and our individual communities in relation to the world.

***Wicked:***

The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West by Gregory Maguire

Summary:

Wicked is a book (and now musical play) about the untold story of Elphaba. Everyone knows the classic Wizard of Oz story that ends in the famous melting of the Wicked Witch of the West. But what do we really know about the Wicked Witch? This book looks at the Wicked Witch's upbringing and young adult life. This novel explores the world of Oz revealing to the reader how misunderstood this great villain is and was. Either the novel or the play could be used in the classroom.

Rationale:

Wicked is an interesting twist on a classic story, because it does not re-tell the old story, but adds to the old story. This novel strives to recreate the old story by telling an “untold” element of the story. The author wished to push the boundaries of our perspective on a character by presenting a classical character in new light. While reading this book students must really question pre-conceived notions of good vs. evil as they start to fall in love with a classically understood “evil” character. This is a great book for discussing perspectives and asking what perspectives are lost when we tell stories. Whose story is being told and also whose story is being left out? All authors make choices in presenting characters, and often some perspectives are not fully developed. This book is defiantly an interesting twist on a classic book and movie, but it is also included on the list because of the questions on perspectives and concepts of evil that the book explores.



Jane

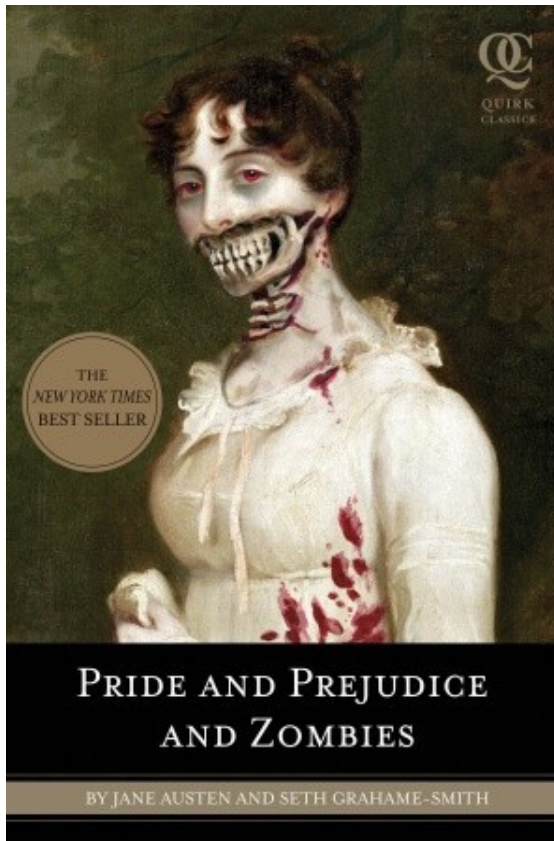
by April Lindner

Summary:

*This is a story about Jane: a woman whose world comes crashing down when her parents die in a car crash during her first year of University. She is left penniless and needs to find a job. She is then hired as a nanny for a famous but out-of-work rock star. After winning over her young charge she soon wins the heart of her employer. However, there is a mysterious woman from the past and disturbing things start happening on the upper floors of the mansion—can these two ever have a happy ever after? Beyond the modern setting, April Lindner stays true to the original plot of *Jane Eyre*.*

Rationale:

Although this is a modern retelling of *Jane Eyre*, the novel stays very true to the original work. This allows the reader to closely observe how a classic tale looks and plays out in our modern world. Students could read this book first in order to understand the plot of *Jane Eyre* before actually reading the original. Students can ask: Does this classic play out organically in the modern setting? Are there elements of the original lost? What changes are made in character development to fit a modern audience? Unlike some other books, which take far larger leaps and liberties with plot, *Jane* really does stay true to the first work. With this in mind, students can analyse the longevity of this classic tale and see if it still “works” in today’s world.



Pride and Prejudice and Zombies

By Seth Grahame-Smith

Summary:

It is what the title promises. This is the classical story of *Pride and Prejudice* but with added Zombie smashing. It's Victorian England and a pelage has broken out bringing people back from the dead. And of course, these people want your brains! Our heroine must strive to rid the countryside of zombies and balance her misunderstood love life. Mr. Darcy is in full character as he wittily argues with Elizabeth and destroys Zombies. It's the romance and heartbreak of the original but with decaying corpses and death a second time around!

Rationale:

Like many of the other novels mentioned in this set this is a classic story with a new twist; however, the actual story and time place does not change. Instead of modernizing the story, or writing from a different character's perspective a single new element has been added to the classic novel. The dialogue and story really are the same—it is just that now there are also Zombies. Students can explore the similarities of the two novels. Questions can be asked about the pleasure of reading of both novels. Is one more gripping than the other? What does this say about our society's taste in storytelling? Are we more obsessed with violence than romance? Is our society more interested in the classic story with Zombies because it is a delightful amusing twist on something we already know? Does this story resonate with our modern society more because we can more closely relate to pressures coming from outside forces affecting our lives, as apposed to strict social pressures from within our society?



Jesus Christ Superstar

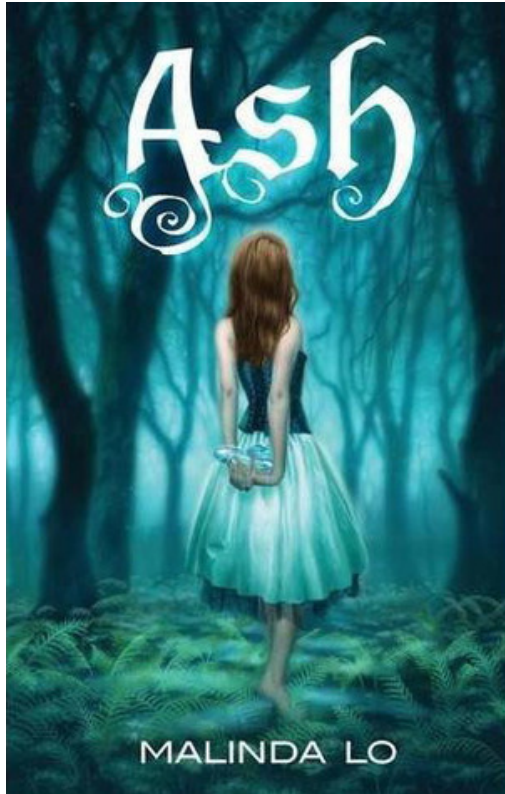
By Andrew Lloyd Webber

Summary:

This play is a musical retelling of the story of Christ's last days through the eyes of Judas. The story keeps to the timeline of the original biblical tale; however, is expressed only through song and focused on the political issues happening at the time. The story looks at Judas' actions through the perspective of a political movement supporter/leader and his relationship to Christ. The most current addition of this play on Broadway places the action in a post-apocalyptic futuristic word—modernizing the classic once more.

Rationale:

This art piece retells a classic biblical story in a very new way. It uses modern theater and music to tell the story. It also tells the story mostly from Judas' perspective. As such it adds a very different twist to our understanding of the story of Jesus' last days. It not only introduces multiple perspectives, but it also asks us to question the multiple motivations that a person/character can have. In addition, the newest production of the play (currently on Broadway) also sets the play in a more futuristic post-apocalyptic world—modernizing the classic story even more. In addition it is also the vision of and currently directed by Des McAnuff, an American-Canadian. The original show even debuted in Stratford, Ontario. It may, of course be difficult to see this Canadian version of the play; however, it may tour again during your teaching time or there are film versions of the play. This piece is also controversial for it's religious content. As such, one can use it in the classroom but you will have to be well aware of the class audience and bring up the controversial nature of the content. A great look at a rock-and-roll approach to the Bible.



Ash

By Malinda Lo

Summary:

Ash is a young lady when her father suddenly dies. She is left to fend for herself in the household of her cruel stepmother. She spends her evening by the fireplace reading the old fairytales of the past—hoping a fairy will come whisk her away. Yet the fairy that arrives is not the sweet kind and soon she is taken into a darker fairy world than she knew existed. She meets the King's Huntress and sparks fly. She must then choose between the new love she has here and the dark fantasy world of the fairies.

Rationale:

Ash is a very different spin on the classic Cinderella. The main character must look to find real love in her current world or enter a dark fairy world. She also finds love with an empowered woman and there isn't a prince in sight. This story takes the classic and then pushes it's reader into a world where gender roles are questioned and LGBTQ issues are front and center. Also unlike the original where "fairytales dreams" do come true—this Cinderella must choose between her fairytale dreams and true love in her current world. In this way, *Ash* raises interesting questions on the validity of dreams and how they should balance with reality. Ripe for questions of gender and sexuality, as well as questions of fantasy verses reality, this new fairytale will have students analyzing the space that fantasy can create for discussion of controversial issues. As well as the role that fairytales may still have in teaching us about the harsh and beautiful elements of reality.



Tam Lyn

Retold by Benjamin Zephania

Summary:

Benjamin Zephania takes the classical English Ballad of *Tam Lyn* and sets it to a modern Dub-Reggie sound track. He also modernizes some of the lyrics to include issues of immigration. In the original story the heroine must save Tam Lyn from the wild fae world and bring him back to society to be with her and her child. In this modern version the courts see Tam Lyn as an alien immigrant. The heroine must fight with the courts to let them be together as a family.

Video can be seen at: <http://imaginedvillage.com/audiovideo/14/>

Rationale:

This ten-minute song is an amazing introduction to classical English Ballad storytelling. To hear the original story (a woman wrestling with the wild to bring Tam home so she will not be an unwed mother) it does not seem like something that is remotely connected to modern day lives or issues. However, the remix by Zephania takes the story into the realm of immigration, war, single parenthood, and much more. We realize that Tam Lyn still lives in our world today and so does the woman that fights for him. Students can explore both classical Ballad styles and the modern use of Dub reggae as forms of storytelling. They can also explore how themes of classic ballads can hold true today. Do we still have a wilderness? What does the 'wild man' mean in modern society? How do we create the modern "Other"? What are our modern demons?



10 Things I Hate About You

Directed by: Gil Junger

This film is a modern adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. The movie is set in a modern high school where a young sophomore is "tragically" not allowed to date. She is popular and outgoing but her father will not let her go out. After much protest he allows her to date, but only if her anti-social sister also dates. And of course madness ensues as many would be suitors try to "tame" the older sister.

Rationale:

This modern movie takes a classic Shakespeare play and adapts it to modern teen-age issues. The family drama may be similar, however, the roles of women in such a gendered play have clearly changed. The end goal for many of the characters also shifts from getting married to getting into University. What does this say about our values in modern North America as apposed to Shakespeare's time period. Also how does the role of the shrew shift? Is Kat more empowered in the modern portrayal or the classical? Have women's roles changed greatly? In addition, have men's roles changed as well? Are their roles more complex now or similar to Shakespeare's play? This is a great movie for comparing transitioning gender roles, but also the overall expectations we have on our youth. And of course, one can ask: Is Shakespeare relevant today? Do his stories stand up to modernization? This movie is another great way of also sparking the discussion of adaptation—after all Shakespeare's plays were also adaptations of other classical works as well.

The Better to Entertain You With, My Dear

'Mirror Mirror,' 'Grimm' and Hollywood Love for Fairy Tales



Jan Thijs

Julia Roberts and Armie Hammer in "Mirror Mirror." [More Photos »](#)By [TERRENCE RAFFERTY](#)

Published: March 21, 2012

"The Better to Entertain You With, My Dear"

By Terrence Rafferty

Summary:

This is a newspaper article discussing this season's obsession with the retelling of Snow White. The article reviews both new Snow White movies as well as the new TV shows *Grimm* and *Once Upon a Time*. The article explores the main themes of the modern takes on old tales and questions what this latest obsessions tells us about our current society.

View: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/25/movies/mirror-mirror-grimm-and-hollywood-love-for-fairy-tales.html>

Rational:

This article explores our current obsession with the retelling of classical fairy tales. It both reviews current examples of this genre and also explores how this reflects on our society. The article raises questions on how we should view the enchanted in our current unenchanted world. The article may at times raise more questions than it answers; however, this makes it a great introduction to critically exploring the genre of modernizing classic stories. With this article students can explore the art of newspaper writing and review writing. In addition it will also act as a great intro to the societal issues that can be revealed by our modern storytelling choices.